CRITICAL DIGEST

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The Weekly Newsletter Digest of the Current New York Theatre Scene

New York Theatre Diary

Maya-Theatre de Lys 6/9/53. First of series of 4 plays to be presented for 1 week each by Terese Hayden. Revival of Simon Gantillon's play. Cast includes Helen Craig,Sono Osato,Kay Medford,staged by Roger Kay. Play which is a big hit abroad was seen on Broadway in 1928 with Aline Macmahon.

Current Theatre Reviews

Me and Juliet-Majestic 5/28/53. Weekly drama critics were more harsh than the daily drama reviewers in filing con notices against the new Rodgers and Hammerstein musical. Newsweek and Variety reviewers were the only ones to recommend musical with show business theme. Former noted that though book is neither inspired or compensatingly witty, Hammerstein's lyrics are intelligent and remarkable singable, and Rodger music offers any number of first rate tunes. Trade paper mugg admitted the wonder boys aren't setting the world on fire, but they haven't pulled a clinker either.Show he notes has more than enough to satisfy general playgoers. Though majority of weekly critics expressed disappointed with the end result, they did laud cast headed by Isabel Bigley,Bill Hayes, Joan McCracken and Ray Walston. Jo Mielziner's settings and Irene Sharaff costumes,plus Robert Alton's dance direction also were highly praised by most. Trouble, as Gibbs,New Yorker,views it, is that the 2 authors are practically incomprable when it comes to adapting material to the musical stage,but are somehow lacking in invention of their own. Beneath its brillant theatrical trappings, Keating,Cue,fears it is a "Ladies Home Journal" level show, storywise and musically. Time man reports musical as an actual specimen of show business mistakes a lot of whirling motion for excitement,trick technique for originality. Granting that from commercial viewpoint show is a hit, Francis,Billboard still believes the result falls short of the mark. WEVD Shipley believes event is unmotivated and uninspired, excelling in nothing but exceptional confusion. With but 4 pro notices filed so far from either daily or weekly critics, the show's current critical rating is 36%.

Can-Can-Shubert 5/7/53 Trio of mild reviews filed by weekly critics in favor of Cole Porter's opus produced by Martin and Feuer. Admitting that in musical comedies he seeks only a few good spots of sight and sound,an occasion to smile and some pleasant people to watch, Clurman,Nation, found more than enough of these items to please him. Critic joined with George Jean Nathan and Hewes,Saturday Review,in crediting most of the evening's fun to Gwen Verdon and dances staged by Michael Kidd. All 3 commented that Porter's music was pleasant,if not original, while Abe Burrows' book was considered by them as dull and unfunny. Nathan summed up their general opinion noting that show would have been much better if designer Jo Mielziner had also painted the book, if dance director Kidd also had danced the dialogue,and if it had somehow been arranged for Verdon to have also played Lilo's role.

Hits Revisited

Martyn Green in Barry Jones role in Misalliance was applauded by Hawkins, World Telegram & Sun and Sheaffer,Eagle, After the initial shock of seeing the famed Gilbert and Sullivan star in a Shaw play, both critics agree that he presents a truly amusing portrayal. Show remains,okays Sheaffer, the brightest,wittiest,most enjoyable comedy on Broadway. While Hawkins was pleased to hear the audience's wild laughter springing from knowing,cultured,sly conversation. Shaw knew,among other things,how to be sexy,funny and unassailable in taste,all at once,he concludes.

Off Broadway

Trio Productions, which has produced Plough and the Stars at Cherry Lane for past 11 weeks, moves to Rice Playhouse, Martha's Vineyard,Mass, for summer. Group will return to Greenwich Village in fall with new play ,The Wise Have Not Spoken.

The Penguin, new play by Norm Vein, presented by Players Group at Current Stages...Dramatists Forum Workshop will present invitational performances of The Loneliest Guy, a new comedy by Forum founder Ray Yates,at Amato Theatre June 16-17 ...Caravan House, 132 E 65, forming a repertory theatre. Harold Winston will direct, Cleon Throckmorton will be scenic consultant. Negro production of Rain planned... Dobbs Ferry Playhouse presenting See You in Canaan, new play by Peter Kane Default.

Verily I Do, new hillbilly play by George Savage and Gladys Charles, at Originals Only didn't impress Rice,Post. Authors, both college drama instructors,should stick to their own professions, drama editor advises. Next new production at playhouse is One Foot To the Sea,a new play by Harold Levitt.

Circle in the Square next production will be The Duke and the King, new play by Francis Fergusson based on"Huckleberry Finn" Group is working out exchange arrangements with Margo Jones' Theatre '53 in Dallas.

Off Broadway groups have nothing to fear but success, explains Atkinson,Times. Theatre unions cannot tolerate an off Broad way group that is successful. The craft unions,he reports,are now requiring Circle in the Square to add salaries totaling$400 per week to the payroll, which may be just enough to put that theatre out of business.

Vaudeville

Frankie Marlowe headlines new Palace show,with Sharkey, Morrison Sisters,Marvellos,Buddy Clayton,Cathy Harris,and Dalton & Bailey...Great Morton,Australian hypnotist at Apollo.

Theatre Book Comment

"The Stage Manager's Handbook" by Bert Gruver(Harpers) tabbed a must by Abel,Variety. Book is a lberal education on backstage operations,trade-paper editor lauded,and is a must for both amateur and pro.

"A Quiet Heart" by Eva LeGallienne (Viking) is an absorbing book,okays Sheaffer,Eagle. Recurrent motif throughout book is her unserving devotion to her ideal of repertory in America. Critic recommended it both as a personal story and a theatrical record.

"Directing the Play",edited by Toby Cole and Helen Krich Chinoy(Bobbs-Merrill) results in a fascinating collection, praises Burr,Playbill.Even the casual playgoer can find his enjoyment vastly increased by an understanding of the problems of staging and the various methods of meeting them, Burr points out.

"Don Juan in the Russian Manner", an adaption of an early Chekhov drama by Basil Ashmore(British Book Centre) performs a great service in getting the ball rolling towards an ultimate production of a vital,important,and imperfect play, comments Hewes,Saturday Review. But he believes present translation makes some unsatisfactory changes in character.

Theatre Record Comment

Martyn Green selections from Gilbert & Sullivan(Columbia) highly recommended by Watt ,News. Though Green's voice is a slight one,Watt notes, he knows how to get those choice words out at top speed and you can almost see him capering through the parts. 16 songs are included.

Green Room Department

EMPIRE FINALE...Effectiveness of the Empire benefit production, with scenes from diverse scripts played in one set, leads Chapman, News to speculate if production and ticket costs could be brought down by the use of simpler sets...Watts, Post wonders if the new building code amendments might not have saved the Empire if passed in time. At least, he adds, it might have been arranged to have a theatre containing some of the historic trappings within the scheme of the new office building...The Empire, from the beginning, represented to professionals and to the playgoing public a tradition of excellence that was based originally on the genius of the fabulous Charles Frohman and continued by the Haymans and Gilbert Miller, recalls Burr, Playbill, who served his theatrical apprenticeship at the theatre which will be torn down within a few weeks.

INCENTIVE FOR BROADWAY...While no builder has yet ordered the steam shovels into Broadway, comments a Herald Tribune editorial, the passage of the building code amendments by the NY City Council has greatly enhanced such a prospect. Perhaps, the paper suggests, there should be some kind of ceremony when the bills are signed.

CRITICAL THOUGHTS...John Golden's sinking fund for needy playwrights was mildly panned by Kerr, Herald Tribune, who fears it is a dangerous kind of friendliness. Though the motive is a good one, unless the creative spirit is harassed, hounded and otherwise humilitated, every hour on the hour, it isn't likely to create much more than some splendid, unmarketable, doodling...Watt, News, finds it disturbing that possibly only the lack of modern, properly air conditioned playhouses prevents NY from having a lively summer stage season.

COLUMN TIPS...The NY critical fraternity will be one less come September, predicts Walker...Belasco will be booked as legit theatre quickly, reports Winchell...Bette Davis is considering an offer to do The Corn is Green in London, hears Farrell...Rodgers & Hammerstein want to run South Pacific to next April when it will break the long idstance record of Oklahoma, Farrell notes.

ADVICE ON COUNCIL...Council of Living Theatres and other groups attempting to increase theatre going out of town were warned by Nathan, Journal American, that the mass audiences they have their sights on do not crave or relish the finer things in drama. Sending more such shows on the road may bring rave notices from the reviewers, but critic points out that crowds will only be cajoled into the theatre only by the dramatic equivalent of what earlier cajoled them away from the theatre and into the movies.

INTERVIEW HI-LITES...Flattering, but inconvenient is how Oscar Hammerstein 2d summed up critical reaction toward Me and Juliet, Variety reports. Author claims audiences after first night were much more enthusiastic than at premiere. Asked if they intended to change anything in the musical, Hammerstein said that the only thing that will change is the audience.

Pros & Cons by T.M.K.

Air conditioning in NY legit theatres could give NY a lively summer theatre season, as Watt, News, wisely pointed out this week. Last summer Wish You Were Here with a cool theatre and an on stage swimming pool was able to defy all the elements and most of the critics. Other producers please copy.

Theatre fans are in for an interesting time if F. Hugh Herbert's comedy The Moon Is Blue proves a success in Berlin under its new title The Virgin on the Roof. Several NY critics have suggested that theatre people put more sex into their titles. Herbert is merely trying it off Broadway.

NYC Theatre News Round Up

New York City council, after more than a year and a half of debate, passed the 22 amendments to the Building Code which will allow new theatres to be built in office and apartment structures. These bills now move on to Mayor Impellitteri's office for signature, but the passage of one, dealing with the sale of liquor in theatres, must also be approved by the New York City Board of Estimate. Councilman Hugh Quinn, who has kept the bills moving forward in the face of some major delays, revealed that Glenn McCarthy, Texas oil and hotel tycoon and Howard Cullman, Broadway "angel" and chairman of the Port of NY Authority, are among those who have expressed interest in building combination office and theatre buildings.

Plays

Kind Sir, Norman Krasna's new comedy which Josh Logan will produce in November, has taken in $200,000 in mail orders...The International Set, Louis Kronenberger's new comedy, is having its world premiere Thur, June 11, at Brandeis University Comedy Festival at Walthen, Mass. Play by Time critic is directed by Eric Bentley, New Republic critic, and features Edna Best, Philip Bourneuf, Romney Brent, Francis Compton, and Mildred Natwick. Produced by Thomas Hammond...Wish You Were Here to celebrate its 1st birthday on June 26 New Haven Railroad Show Train...Rodgers & Hammerstein spending large sums on newspaper display ads to offset the mild and adverse notices of Me and Juliet...Lyceum Theatre, now housing Time Out for Ginger, is now the oldest theatre in NY. First show recorded there is Charles Frohman's The Proud Prince starring E.H. Sothern.

People

Phil Coolidge has taken over the Walter Hampden role in The Crucible...Terry Saunders has been given featured billing in The King and I...Richard Rodgers has endowed a permanent scholarship at Julliard School of Music, New York...Conrad Janis, Time Out For Ginger, doubles into Child's Paramount with his Dixieland Band, The Tailgaters...Betty Field will star in Mary Drayton's new comedy The Peaceful Kingdom, which Theatre Guild tests at Westport, Conn, Playhouse the week of June 22...Janet Blair will star in her first Broadway production this fall, F. Hugh Herbert's A Girl Can Tell...Edwin Bronner, author of The Intruders play which flopped out of town last December, is suing Eddie Dowling for $2000 royalties, author claims producer-director owes him...Alexander Sandor Ince has resumed his association with "Theatre Arts" magazine as assistant to publisher John MacArthur.

Theatre TV & Radio Notes

William Saroyan has joined CBS TV creative group to write original TV plays for the network. George Axelrod, author of The Seven Year Itch, is negotiating with the chain also...John Golden is considering producing on Broadway Robert Howard Lindsay's play "The Chess Game" which appeared on NBC TV Kraft Theatre in February..."Tales of the City", featuring new dramas written by Ben Hecht, will be seen on alterate Thursdays on CBS TV...Washington.D.C. little theatre groups will present one act plays on WMAL TV, ABC TV, marking the 1st use of such groups on a regular basis...Circle in the Square, successful NY Off Broadway group, is planning a monthly TV drama series which would star Geraldine Page.

Theatre Book & Record Notes

Cab Calloway, Porgy & Bess, will cut a 45 RPM album of tunes from the Gershwin score for RCA Victor...MGM Records will release sountrack album of dramatic highlights from "Julius Caesar" film...Harper's will publish Frank M Whiting's "An Introduction to Theatre" this fall.